

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

Please replace the claims with the claims provided in the listing below wherein status, amendments, additions and cancellations are indicated.

1-16. (Cancelled)

17. (Currently amended) A method of inhibiting user hand contact with animal saliva deposited on a play toy during interactive play by the animal and the user, comprising ~~the steps of:~~

providing the toy with an animal access region readily available to a mouth of the animal for gripping thereby;

providing the toy with an animal restricted region which is less likely to be accessed by the mouth of the animal than said animal access region, said animal restricted region being hand-holdable by the user;

presenting the toy to the animal during the interactive play; and

handling the toy by holding said animal restricted region in the hand of the user following gripping of the animal access region in the mouth of the animal.

18-20. (Cancelled)

21. (Currently amended) A method of inhibiting human user hand contact with pet saliva of a pet deposited on a play toy during interactive play by the pet and the user, comprising:

providing the toy with an animal access region and an animal restricted region, said animal access region being comprised of at least one portion of the toy which the pet is more likely to bite and hold in a mouth of the pet by virtue of at least one of enhanced sensory attraction or greater relative physical accessibility to the pet than said animal restricted region, said animal restricted region being comprised of at least another portion of the toy which is conversely less likely to be accessed by the pet during play by reason of at least one of less sensory appeal or structural inaccessibility to the pet than said animal access region, such that saliva of the pet is deposited to at least a lesser degree on said toy within said animal ~~access~~ restricted region as compared to said animal ~~restricted~~ access region when the toy is naturally picked up in the mouth of the pet; and

handling the toy following said toy being picked up in the mouth of the pet by grasping of the animal restricted region by the user such that contact with saliva by the user is inhibited.

22. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 21, wherein said providing includes creating the animal restricted region by providing shielding

structure which physically deters the pet from accessing said animal restricted region from access by the mouth of the pet, yet is configured to allow ~~allows~~ the hand of the human user to access the animal ~~restricted~~ restricted region.

23. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 22, wherein:

said animal restricted region includes at least one handle graspable by the hand of the human user, said at least one handle including a portion extending longitudinally at least partially along a handle axis; and

said shielding structure includes an at least one structural portion disposed in a spaced apart radial position of said handle relative to said handle axis, said at least one structural portion being located so as to be at least partially coextensive with an axial positioning of said handle.

24. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 21, wherein said providing includes:

orienting an at least one structural portion in a position readily accessible by the mouth of the pet and by which the pet can hold the toy by retaining the at least one structural portion in the mouth to serve as said animal access region;

orienting an at least one grip which is hand-accessible by the user to serve as said animal restricted region; and

arranging a shielding portion to at least partially discourage animal access to said at least one grip by inhibiting access of the mouth of the pet thereto, at least a portion of said grip being disposed in an axial position along a toy axis which is disposed axially inwardly of an axially outermost portion of said shielding portion in a direction of said toy axis.

25. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 24, wherein:

said at least one structural portion includes an elongated member structure extending along a toy axis between opposed ends thereof;

said at least one grip includes at least one handle disposed at at least one of said opposed ends of said elongated member structure; and

said shielding portion includes shielding structure ~~extending radially~~ at least partially disposed about said at least one handle, said shielding structure being positioned so as to be radially spaced apart from said at least one handle.

26. (Withdrawn) A method according to claim 25, wherein said shielding structure includes a generally cup-shaped shield having open ends arranged to point outward of a central region of the toy in a direction of said toy axis.

27. (Withdrawn) A method according to claim 26, wherein the shield includes cutouts therein.

28. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 25, wherein said at least one handle includes two handles disposed respectively at the opposed ends of said elongated ~~member~~ structure.

29. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 24, wherein said at least one structural portion includes elements disposed in circumferentially spaced apart positions about a toy axis, said elements including at least ~~and which include~~ portions thereof which are radially spaced apart from said toy axis.

30. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 29, wherein said ~~members~~ elements include at least three ~~members~~ elements, at least a portion of each of the ~~members~~ three elements extending longitudinally co-directional with said toy axis.

31. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 30, wherein said at least a portion of said three ~~members~~ elements which extend longitudinally are

spaced apart circumferentially from one another by approximately equal angular intervals.

32. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 30, wherein:

said at least one grip includes at least one handle of elongated dimension arranged along a longitudinal handle axis which is approximately aligned with the toy axis; and

said portions of said ~~members~~ elements which are radially spaced apart from said toy axis are extended outward from a center of the toy in an axial direction such that said portions extend past an axial position of an inwardmost end of the handle closest to said center, thereby at least partially shielding the handle.

33. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 32, wherein said portions of said ~~members~~ elements which are radially spaced apart from said toy axis are configured to collectively describe a generally spherical envelope.

34. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 33, further comprising configuring the toy to be a self-righting, such that when landing onto a generally horizontal support surface, the toy is free to roll as a ball yet, will generally come to rest with the handle extending generally horizontally.

35. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 29, wherein said providing includes integrally molding the toy.

36. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 35, wherein the toy is comprised of a resilient material.

37. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 23, wherein:
a toy axis passes through said at least one handle, said at least one handle being accessible by the hand of the user at least in a direction of said toy axis; and
said structure at least partially physically shielding said animal restricted region from access by the mouth of the pet is at least partially defined by structural portions of said animal access regions arranged to at least partially surround at least an axially coextensive portion of said handle thereby forming a radial opening of a predetermined size in such a manner as to discourage access by the mouth of the pet to said handle when approached from a general direction along said toy axis, based upon the predetermined size of said radial opening being suitably selected to allow passage of the hand therethrough for access to said handle, but to discourage access thereof by the mouth of the pet.

38. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 37, wherein:

said handle is defined at least partially by an elongated member portion extending longitudinally codirectionally with said toy axis; and

said structural portions of said animal access regions which are arranged to at least partially surround at least the coextensive portion of said handle are extended outward from a central region of the toy in an axial direction to an axial position proximately coinciding with a corresponding axial position of a terminal end of said at least one handle.

39. (Currently amended) A method of inhibiting human user hand contact with pet saliva of a pet deposited on a play toy during interactive play by the pet and the user, comprising:

providing the toy with an animal access region and an animal restricted region, said animal access region being comprised of at least one portion of the toy which the dog is more likely to bite and hold in a mouth of the pet by virtue of at least one of enhanced sensory attraction or greater relative physical accessibility to the pet than said animal restricted region, said animal restricted region being comprised of at least another portion of the toy which is conversely less likely to be accessed by the pet during play than said animal access region by reason of at least one of less sensory appeal or structural inaccessibility to the pet than said animal access region; [[and]]

allowing the pet to pick up the toy by gripping a naturally-accessed portion of the toy in the mouth of the pet while the toy is free of the hand of the user; and

acquiring the toy by the user following the gripping of the toy in the mouth of the pet by grasping at least a portion of said animal restricted region by the hand of the user.

40. (New) A method according to claim 39, further comprising:

holding the toy in said animal restricted region by the hand of the user; and

releasing the toy from the hand of the user prior to said allowing the pet to pick up the toy.

41. (New) A method of reducing human user hand exposure to pet saliva of a pet deposited on a play toy during interactive play by the pet and the user, comprising:

providing the toy with an animal access region and an animal restricted region, said animal access region being comprised of at least one portion of the toy which the pet is more likely to bite and hold in a mouth of the pet by virtue of at least one of enhanced sensory attraction or greater relative physical accessibility to the pet than said animal restricted region, said animal restricted region being comprised of at least another portion of the toy which is conversely less likely to be accessed by

the pet during play by reason of at least one of less sensory appeal or structural inaccessibility to the pet than said animal access region, such that saliva of the pet is deposited to at least a lesser degree on said toy within said animal restricted region as compared to said animal access region when the toy is picked up in the mouth of the pet by a portion of the toy freely selected by the pet; and

handling the toy following said toy being picked up in the mouth of the pet by grasping of the animal restricted region by the user such that exposure to saliva by the hand of the user is reduced.

42. (New) A method according to claim 41, wherein said providing includes creating the animal restricted region by providing shielding structure which physically deters the pet from accessing said animal restricted region from access by the mouth of the pet, yet is configured to allow the hand of the human user to access the animal restricted region.